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Task for SAC Under SALT Grows With Monitor Losses

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The Strategic Air Command will shoulder a considerable share of the task of monitoring the development and deployment of Soviet weapons if the United States and the Soviet Union reach a new strategic arms limitation agreement.

The prospective weight of that burden has been increased by recent occurrences which have impaired American intelligence-gathering abilities.

As a result, there would be a greater reliance on SAC reconnaissance resources in an attempt to make certain that the Soviets are living up to their end of a SALT II agreement. The World-Herald has learned.

This would be especially true in the early life of a treaty.

SAC operates fleets of two important reconnaissance aircraft — the SR-71 and the U-2. Both types of planes would be employed extensively in the verification process which President Carter has promised would be adequate despite the loss of monitoring stations in Iran and other setbacks.

Some military experts disagree with Carter. Among them is retired Air Force Lt. Gen. Daniel Graham, former director of the Defense Intelligence Agency.

Graham has said flatly: "The SALT II treaty cannot be verified."

Both SAC aircraft have highly sophisticated capabilities.

Despite its age (it has been a SAC plane since 1957), the U-2 remains in extensive use. SAC has about 50 of them.

There are about 30 SR-71s. That plane, which holds the world speed record, can cruise at more than 3,000 mph.

The U-2, which has a top speed of about 500 mph, can

climb to about 70,000 feet above sea level. The SR-71 has a substantially higher flight ceiling — possibly the highest of any warplane.

Most U-2s and SR-71s are based near Marysville, Calif. But U-2s frequently fly from Britain, Taiwan and other countries. SAC also maintains a small unit of SR-71s on Okinawa.

Operating at near altitude limits, either reconnaissance aircraft can photograph enormous areas in minute detail.

Not Over Russia

The two types of planes also can use electronic surveillance equipment.

But would those airborne eyes and ears be able to penetrate enough of the vast territory of the Soviet Union to verify treaty stipulations while flying outside its borders? The question disturbs some military men.

It is not considered likely that reconnaissance flights would be made over Soviet territory. No U.S. spy plane is known to have ventured over a Soviet border since a U-2 on loan from SAC to the Central Intelligence Agency and piloted by Francis Gary Powers was shot down in the Soviet Union 19 years ago.

Not only would a resumption of U.S. reconnaissance flights over Soviet territory jeopardize relations between the two countries but, in view of greatly improved Russian air defenses, such flights would be risky, sources said.

So it is considered almost certain that the SAC reconnaissance planes would have to work from beyond Soviet borders.

Risk in Iran

Air space over Turkey and the Black Sea are possibilities. So are the Baltic Sea and Arctic Ocean areas. But those north-

ern skies are far from Soviet missile fields.

Flights over Iran and Afghanistan also are considered possible regardless of the wishes of those countries. However, SALT II critics maintain that such flights might push the present Iranian leadership closer to the Soviet Union and could lead to the establishment of Soviet air defenses in Afghanistan.

U-2s have been based in Pakistan from time to time. Powers took off on his ill-fated flight from a base in that country.

But relations between the U.S. and Pakistan are not good. The Carter administration cut off military assistance to that country after it was discovered that Pakistan was attempting to use nuclear technology being provided for peaceful purposes to construct nuclear weapons.

The U.S. had planned to use ground stations in Iran and Turkey and the KH-11 spy satellite to verify Soviet adherence to SALT II provisions.

Five Years

Graham has said the satellite probably was rendered useless by the sale last year to the Soviets of the KH-11 operating manual by an American turncoat.

The monitoring stations in Iran have been shut down by that country's new leaders.

CIA Director Stansfield Turner was reported to have told a congressional committee in secret testimony that an effective spy satellite system for treaty verification is five years away.

The White House insists that such a satellite system could be made to function in about a year.

Either way, SAC's reconnaissance aircraft will have to help fill the breach if SALT II becomes a reality this year.